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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

13 June 1951

Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence

Subject: Communist Military Tactics in Korea -- A Note on the
Employment of Massed Manpower*

Preliminary reports from Korea indicate that the Chinese Communists are using poorly-trained conscripts in considerable numbers in front line units, while holding in reserve a number of the regular and presumably better-trained and equipped Field Army units identified as being present in North Korea and Manchuria. These reports suggest that the Chinese have adopted a tactic commonly employed by the Soviet Army and Communist forces in the Far East when attacking strongly-held positions or fighting an extended war of attrition. This tactic calls for the use of raw recruits in the front lines while trained (and usually better equipped) manpower is held in reserve to exploit breakthroughs or fight decisive engagements. Local militia were often employed in this way by the Chinese Communist Liberation Army in attacking strongly-held Nationalist

* This first subject is under detailed study by ID. This memorandum merely suggests a pattern currently emerging from preliminary evidence.

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positions during the civil war period, while regular troops were held in reserve, and recent reports indicate that the Viet Minh are employing regional and guerrilla troops in the same way.*

In the early stages of the Korean war, the North Koreans used their best troops in the assault in an attempt to win a quick victory, but when the fighting became stabilized at the Nakdong River line and a war of attrition appeared in prospect, the North Korean command attempted to conserve its trained manpower by using substantial numbers of poorly-trained conscripts in forward assault units. (The conservation of trained cadres explains the North Korean capability to reorganize and place an effective army in the field despite heavy over-all losses.)

It appears that the Chinese Communists brought some of their most effective 3rd and 4th Field Army units into Korea and employed them in their initial attacks, presumably with the expectation of an early victory. If, as is indicated by reports of substantial numbers of "lower quality" troops and recent conscripts among the prisoners taken in recent weeks, the Chinese Communists have adopted the tactic of conserving

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trained manpower by filling front line units with poorly-trained conscripts, this fact would suggest that:

- (a) The Chinese Communists have given up hope of a quick victory and are attempting to conserve their more effective trained manpower.
- (b) Chinese Communist offensive capabilities probably have been and will continue to be reduced by the logistic problems involved in maintaining a large and steady flow of replacements to Korea, and by the limited combat efficiency of poorly-trained and equipped massed manpower.
- (c) Losses inflicted on forward Chinese elements will not, however, bring about a proportionate reduction of the over-all numerical strength of trained Chinese Communist military manpower.
- (d) By holding substantial numbers of trained troops in reserve in North Korea and Manchuria, the Chinese Communists can maintain a strong resistance potential in North Korea for an extended period.

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